



# Validating a Psychology as a Helping Profession Scale

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## ABSTRACT

**We developed a Psychology as a Helping Profession (PHP) scale. Two major factors were personal growth/helping skills and helping society; these were only mildly correlated with Friedrich's (1996) Psychology as Science scale. Psychology majors were more likely to endorse psychology as a helping profession and as a science than non-majors. The results of this study can be useful in departmental assessment in order to better serve the needs and interests of students.**

## METHOD

Participants were 380 students (252 females; 128 males) at a Mid-western public university. The students were enrolled in a range of psychology courses: 189 students enrolled in an introductory psychology course and 191 students enrolled in various upper level psychology courses.

The 15-item PHP (see Table 1) was developed by an expert panel using scales on psychology majors characteristics (e.g. Gallucci, 1997) and popular notions of mental health practice. Utilizing the same 7-point Likert scale as the PAS, the PAS and PHP items were interwoven, for a total of 35 items. The two scales were embedded in a larger survey of student goals.

## INTRODUCTION

Although 76,000 baccalaureate degrees in psychology are awarded every year (Kuther & Morgan, 2007), the reasons for choosing psychology are unclear (Breen & Lindsay 2001). A desire to help others, as opposed to engaging in a scientific enterprise, may be a strong component of students' motivation for psychology.

Whereas Friedrich (1996) has developed and validated a scale measuring endorsement of Psychology as Science (PAS), there is no equivalent scale measuring endorsement of psychology as a helping profession. Because many students and professionals consider this aspect of psychology important, we sought to develop and validate a Psychology as a Helping Profession (PHP) scale against the PAS.

## RESULTS

Principal Components Analysis (with a Promax rotation) of PHP and career items revealed four factors (see Table 1). Factor 1 involved personal growth and helping skills. Factor 2 involved applied work to help society. Factors three and four each had two items reflecting aspects of careers and research aspects of therapy. Factors 1 and 2 were combined to form the PHP because they were conceptually related and together had good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .820).

A MANOVA indicated significant differences in PAS and PHP scores (which were mildly correlated,  $r = .279$ ) across 4 levels of students (non-majors, those contemplating being majors, general psychology majors, and human services emphasis majors),  $F(6,684) = 3.078$ ,  $p = .006$ . Univariate tests are presented in Table 2.

## TABLE 1

### Factor Loadings for Principal Component Analysis

PHP Scale Item	1	2	3	4
Psychology courses should help people grow in self-awareness.	.769			
An undergraduate psychology major can help people learn to cope with stressors.	.745			
People can really learn to understand themselves by taking psychology courses.	.735			
People can learn to enhance their health (e.g., stop smoking) through courses in psychology.	.715			
By studying psychology, students can help friends and family with personal problems.	.599			
Psychology classes should help people improve parenting skills.	.506			
People in psychology majors should study why hate crimes are committed.		.878		
Courses in psychology should help people in assisting victims of child abuse and domestic violence.		.504		
Undergraduate psychology courses should help people learn principles to improve the work environment.	.392	.423		
An undergraduate psychology major should be focused on teaching people practical ways to help others.		.407		
People who are psychology majors learn to enhance personal relationships with others.	.308	.357		
I would like to do psychological research in the future.			.803	
I would like to be a psychotherapist or counselor in the future.			.795	
Many psychology majors have been through therapy and now want to help others.				.851
Psychology classes should focus on analyzing whether therapy is effective.		.468		.476

## TABLE 2

### Means, Standard Deviations, and F Tests for the Four Conditions

Condition	PAS	PHP
1. Non-Psychology Majors (n = 203)	4.90 (.57)	4.59 (.80)
2. Considering the Psychology Major (n = 30)	4.90 (.57)	4.76 (.69)
3. General Psychology Major (n= 74)	5.14 (.57)	4.82 (.82)
4. Human Services Psychology Major (n = 40)	5.17 (.49)	4.79 (.64)
<i>F</i> (3,343)	5.162	2.241
<i>p</i>	.002	.083
$\eta^2$	.04	.02
Comparisons	1,2 < 3,4	1 < 3

## DISCUSSION

Overall, there is a general increase in the endorsement of psychology as a helping profession *and* as a science as students progress from undeclared to psychology majors. Non-majors endorsed psychology as a science less than all other groups. Psychology majors were more likely to endorse psychology as a helping profession than non-majors.

Contrary to our expectations, the two orientations (PAS and PHP) were not antithetical. In fact, human services emphasis psychology majors showed the highest levels of endorsement of psychology as a science, perhaps because our program emphasizes the importance of utilizing research in refining clinical and counseling practice.

These findings are useful for psychology departments who, as a part of departmental assessment, wish to understand the attitudes of their students. Thus, psychology programs can capitalize on the finding that over time students come to consider psychology a “science of helping.”

## REFERENCES

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